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ABSTRACT

As a member of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, Herbert Marcuse believed that industrial capitalism and the bureaucratization of society stripped humans of any claims to autonomy and undermined their critical expression with a functional language. However, Marcuse did no more than point an inchoate ideological finger at the production side of the media and, therefore, was unable to join theory with practice. His emphasis was on the separation of the private and public spheres, with a reasoning public mediating the two through the use of critical, rational concepts. Needs were to be generated from the enclaves of privatized reason, whose satisfaction was made to be seen as serving the interests of all. The unanswered question was what were true and false needs. Failing to translate his concepts into practice, he turned to the "lumpenproletariat," an inchoate and unlocalized "class" as agents of change. However, his lack of theory vitiated any attempts to show the role that humans would play in accomplishing and then maintaining their emancipation. He further maintained that the only way to get a "fresh look" at facts heretofore mediated by the dominant interests was by undemocratic means, including a restraint on freedom of expression. Later he moderated this stance to one of discriminating intolerance. Unlike Marcuse, mass media researchers need to make clear what counts for them as ideological. Such research endeavors would entail carefully constructed problems informed by interpretative sociologies, along with solid empirical data on the economics of the mass media. (HOD)

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Herbert Marcuse's Critical Theory of the Media

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INTRODUCTION

As a member of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, Marcuse embarks on a familiar post-Enlightenment project of reconciling the two ideals of radical freedom and integral expression. Taylor describes this intellectual project as the romantic "opposition between the fullest self-conscious freedom, on the one side, and life in the community, on the other; the opposition between self-consciousness and communion with nature; and beyond this the separation of finite subjectivity from the infinite life that flowed through nature..." (1975:36). Like his intellectual counterparts, Marcuse believes that the twentieth century development of industrial capitalism to monopoly capitalism and the increasing bureaucratization of society and state has stripped man of any reputed claims to autonomy and undermined his critical expressivity with a functional language.

However, while Marcuse, at times, focuses on the linguistic appropriation by the corporate media of critical political concepts to terms encouraging a politically passive and consuming public, he fails to come to grips with intersubjectivity as the constitutive feature of an expressive domain. He does not show or discuss how mass mediated communication thwarts an audience's constitution of an other and is thus not open to processes of mutuality and reciprocity. That is, the mediated situation is ego-centric to both speaker and listener. In other words, Marcuse does not show the way out of a manipulative rhetoric that handles the other as an object to be managed instrumentally. The denial of self-production is an expressive domain is aptly captured by Hegel's famous dialectic of the master and the slave. Taylor elaborates:

> ...men strive for recognition, for only in this way can they achieve integrity. But recognition must be mutual. The being whose recognition of me is going to count for me must be one that I recognize as human. The operation of reciprocal recognition is therefore one we accomplish together. Each one, says Hegel, accomplishes for himself what the other tries to achieve in relation to him. My interlocutor sees in me another, but one which is not foreign, which is at one with himself; but this cancelling of my otherness is something that I must help to accomplish as well.
>
> The contradiction arises when men at a raw and undeveloped state of history try to wrest recognition from another without reciprocating. This is at a stage when men have not recognized themselves as universal, for to have done so is to see that recognition for me, for what I am, is recognition of man as such and therefore something that in principle should be extended to all. But here we have man as a particular individual who strives to impose himself, to achieve external confirmation (1975:153).

Unfortunately, while Marcuse does not show the addressees of twentieth century media activities the way out of the communicative morass at the interpersonal level--the expressive deadness of our commercialized world, neither does he do any more than point an inchoate ideological finger at the production side of the media. Marcuse, in <u>non-Marxian</u>-like fashion, does not scrutinize the existing system of media organization, media personnel, or even media products. Thus, in this regard, Cohen's criticism of Marcuse is scathingly on the mark:

> He (Marx) interposed organizational facts between persons and things. Television, for example, is an appendage of a definite corporate structure, and this, not its direct relations with the perceiving organism, engages the Marxist attention. That is why Marcuse is not Marxist when he says: 'Perhaps the most telling evidence can be obtained simply by looking at television or listening to the AM radio for one consecutive hour for a couple of days, not shutting off the commercials, and now and then changing the station.' What does such evidence yield? It stimulates thoughts about transactions between minds and things which have been removed from their places in the social configuration. Explanations based on data of this sort belong not to Marx but to McLuhan. His (Marcuse's) chief interest in cultural and other products is not their production process and the men engaged in it, but the way they are marketed and consumed (1969:42-43).

Like his intellectual colleagues--the Frankfurt School, Marcuse was unable to join theory and practice, to provide the levers and agencies for progressive change. Before detailing these deficiencies, some background in the principles and targets of critical theory may be instructive.

AN OUTLINE OF CRITICAL THEORY

The twentieth century experience with Marxism in this country has always been rather scant, despite the Socialist Party's electoral apogee of 1912. So, even that success provided no real reason to reverse Sombart's lament on the working class manque written five years earlier. As Bottomore correctly notes concerning the twenties and thirties, "Marxism was more frequently and extensively discussed in such liberal journals as The Nation and The New Republic. Yet it was not widely accepted, and above all, there was not created any significant body of Marxist social thought applied to American society and culture" (1968:37). Thus, it would take Nazi persecution and intolerance and consequent flight to this country by Frankfurt School members to supply an edge, at least on the theoretical side, to Sombart's question some thirty years later. The initial focus of the Frankfurt School, then, was double-edged. On the one side, Frankfurt School members attacked the authoritarian and totalitarian impulses of fascism, and on the other side, they criticized liberal impotence alongside the forces of corporate capitalism.

Synoptically, the intellectual legacy of critical theory involves emancipation from external constraints or factors that contribute to the deformation of a critical rationality that, in turn, heavily effected

the eclipse of the public sphere. Noting critical theorists' aversion to closed philosophical systems marks the difficulty one encounters in trying to unravel their central preoccupations. The philosophical language and the unevenness and difficulties attendant with translation complicate matters.

What they endeavored to work out was no less than a comprehensive theory of rationality. They begin their task with a critical analysis of the unfulfilled promise of the Enlightenment. The focus is on the deformations of reason brought on by the alliance of bourgeois capitalism with the increasing scientization in all spheres of life beginning in the eighteenth century and culminating in the domination of contemporary civilization by instrumental reason.

For critical theorists, the promise of the Enlightment was the notion of an objective reason inherent in the structure of reality and a subjective reason in man himself such that each man could comprehend his social reality in relation to other men and nature. Critical theorists see critique as embedded in a reason "committed to the task of seeking truth; but to a truth which has yet to be established. Whence it follows that critical activity does not yield truth directly, but indirectly. Truth is to be reached ...through the destruction of appearance and illusions. ...It is now assumed that truth flourishes...through the medium of a communicative struggle" (Connerton, 1980:19). Reason served as the arbiter of means and ends. Methodological reflection and speculative insight through reason would enable man to grasp the nature of things and direct his destiny. Reason was the force that the rising bourgeoisie envisioned as the replacement of religion and repressive political rule. A society organized by reason

would adhere to the concepts of justice, freedom, happiness, and property. As Horkheimer, puts it, "Objective reason aspires to replace traditional religion with methodical philosophical thought and insight and thus to become a source of tradition all by itself" (1947:12). However, as Horkheimer goes on to argue, the power of man's thought pushed man to center stage enabling him progressively to unveil myths and superstitions in nature. Rationalism did not quarrel with religion over the nature of an ultimate objective truth, but it did dispute which agency was best able to determine that truth. Man's necessary reclamation of his ego-consciousness as a power over nature forgets that he too is part of nature and thus destroys himself. Man's domination over nature leads to the domination of man over other men. "Having given up autonomy, reason has become an instrument" (Horkheimer, 1947:21).

Empirical-analytic science, critical theorists argue, is reason instrumentally employed in the interest of technical control and prediction motivated by a principle of efficiency. In that respect, it is no different than other forms of labor. : Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the use of formalized (instrumental) reason can be traced to the later Enlightenment which equated the truth with scientific systematization (1972:85). Science is technical practice as far removed from reflective consideration of its own goal as are other forms of labor under the pressure of the system. The Enlightenment, which had harnessed itself to the capitalistic mode of production, had lost its critical function and thereby abrogated itself. In short, the argument critical theorists made could not brook the unequivocal appropriation of reason by the empirical-analytic sciences which subordinated reason to

positivistic methods--the perception, observation, and precise measurement of things as they are. Methodical certainty, positivists would argue, separates facts from value by eliminating the knowing subject as the point of reference. Epistemology as theory of knowledge is thereby replaced by philosophy of science.

Critical theorists contend that the fact-value dichotomy leads to positivism's belief in itself and thus ends up in a vicious circle in regard to its truth claim. That is, positivism defines an object domain, sets up the rules for the determination of exact knowledge, and then uses its results to validate its truth claim. Habermas argues that even science is subject to communicative interaction by showing that the very constitution of the rules presupposes a pre-scientific pre-understanding. The notion of the intersubjectivity of a community of scientists presupposes communicative interaction without which one could not have empirical-analytical sciences. The restoration of the reflexive dimension garnered from Kant's active elements in cognition is a major contribution of the Frankfurt School. It is this reappropriation of the reflexive method which stresses that only the scientist's participation in the everyday world makes knowledge of social reality objectively possible (Giddens, 1976:120). This reflexive notion further reveals that "operationalizations are ad hoc: they can be more or less appropriate but in principle they are always subject to revision" (Wellmer, 1971:36).

This assault on instrumental reason was no sterile intellectual exercise for critical theorists. The twentieth century was witness to a concerted and self-conscious effort to professionalize and rationalize the marriage of science to industry under the auspices of practicing

engineers, the universities, and corporate capitalism (see Noble, 1977). Furthermore, national advertising and information industries were not to be left behind. These practitioners were caught up in an informed effort of "corporate class consciousness" that sought to transform "self-sufficient" populations into habituated dependencies on consumerism as a way of life (see Ewen, 1976).

With regard to these changes in work and culture, critical theorists argued that cultural products were rationally calculated and planned to fit the market needs for every audience-discerned type in the society. All forms of mass media fit the same bill. Once the industry hit upon a winning formula, they reproduced standardized products with the same story line and organization. The statisticalization of consumer types was classified and categorized within a pervasive cultural sphere of administration. "Everyone must behave as if spontaneously in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972:123). The producers have done everything for the consumer, all the latter must do is fulfill his consumer ballot by purchase. Everything was calculated to entertain, even the news, so distractions would not undo the social glue. "The notion of popular culture, they argued was ideological; the culture industry administered a non-spontaneous reified, phony culture rather than the real thing" (Jay, 1973:216). Thus the media were full partners in the culture industry--in terms of producing entertainment fare and in terms of providing the vehicle to promote the sale of other mass produced goods. "Mass production requires mass consumption," Ellul writes, "But there cannot be mass consumption without widespread identical views as to what

the necessities of life are...One therefore needs fundamental psychological unity on which advertising can play with certainty when manipulating public opinion" (1965:68).

Critical theory thus differs in at least two significant ways from its Marxist heir. In the twentieth century capitalism had entered a qualitatively new stage with the growth of monopolies and increasing governmental intervention in the economy. The superstructure could only naively be viewed as a reflection of the base because the former delved into the latter with supportive social welfare and ameliorative fiscal and monetary corrections. Wellmer therefore writes that critical theory, in contradistinction to Marx, establishes that the fateful process of "rationalization" of all processes of social life does not find its preordained end in an emancipated society. Marx had focused on the exchange principle underlying social relations in the market economy at the expense of communicative interaction (1971:132). Critical theorists shifted their critique to the domination of instrumental, subjective manipulative reason as the handmaiden of technological domination. Absent rational goals, all interaction was subsumed under power relations (Jay, 1973:271-272).

A second increasingly evident change from traditional Marxian theory was the recognition of the integration of the proletariat into the lower middle classes such that the proletariat could no longer be viewed as a legitimate change agent. The power of self reflection seemed impotent as the class most oppressed was also the most self complacent. Having given this excursus on critical theory, we will now turn to Herbert Marcuse's critical theory--one that served as both a

resource and a topic in his condemnation of advanced industrial societies.

HERBERT MARCUSE

Although Marcuse emigrated to the United States in 1934, his major influence in this country was not felt until the sixties. In his most pessimistic work, One-Dimensional Man, Marcuse emphasizes the vital importance of the work of C. Wright Mills for some of his own formulations (1964:xvii). Being an early member of the Frankfurt School, it comes as no surprise that Marcuse also credits fellow members, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, along with Hegel, Marx, and Freud, as dominant influences upon his thought (Keen and Raser, 1971:35).

In regard to the influence of the Frankfurt School on Marcuse, however, there is no question. Like his intellectual comrades, Marcuse's interest in a comprehensive theory of rationality dates to the twenties and thirties, and manifests itself in an historical concern with the fate of the Weimar Republic, the decline of democratic socialism, and the struggle against the Nazi regime. And, it is this shared history that Marcuse and other emigré intellectuals brought to this country. Marcuse's flight from Nazi Germany landed him for a time in Los Angeles with a group of liberal and radical German emigrés that included Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann (Goodwin, 1971:74). Other emigrés ended up at the Institute for Social Research at Columbia University with whom Marcuse maintained contact and where he also often worked between 1934 and 1938. After acquiring citizenship in 1940, Marcuse and his friend and colleague, Franz Neumann, shared the war

experience as civilian intelligence officers in the Office of Strategic Services and later at the State Department (Goodwin, 1971:74; Marcuse in Neumann, 1957:viii).

After Marcuse's battle against Nazism while in the employ of the State Department, he joined Columbia's Russian Institute in 1951, and had mixed lecture duties at Columbia and Harvard up to 1953. From Columbia, Marcuse moved on to Brandeis University for his first formal university appointment and a twelve year stay, and then on to the San Diego branch of the University of California, until political pressure forced him out in 1970 (Goodwin, 1971:74).

It is no small irony that Marcuse's "popular" reputation was greatly facilitated in the turbulent sixties by the same mass media in this country that happened to be his favorite target. Like other cult figures, Marcuse's "celebrity status" can probably be attributed more to their rendition of him and his work than to any widespread reading and understanding of his rather ponderous prose. Clecak pointedly summarizes this ironic state of affairs:

> Marcuse made especially good copy because his association with New Left figures suggested such easy and satisfying interpretations. Journalists and critics accounted for the unlikely alliance in pop Freudian terms characterizing Marcuse as a surrogate father who encouraged and sanctioned political and sexual rebellion (1973:212).

Some critics argue that Marcuse's very entry into the pages of the press knocks a chink in the supposedly impenetrable armor of one-dimensional society, or even more to the point, that the publication of his 1964 book was itself a contradiction. While Marcuse's thick brush sometimes <u>seems</u> to paint only in black and white, his work is not that simple. As we shall see in his notion of repressive tolerance, Marcuse would argue that the media can afford to range afield, dependent on the

degree of controversy, because their apparent openness is rendered safely within limits by their preferred readings. In this example, youthful rebellion can be safely explained, in pop psychology terms, as a stage in the maturation process with Marcuse the guru filling the void created by their materially acquisitive, and spiritually debased middle class parents.

However, Marcuse seemed to enjoy the sudden popularity and his Essay on Liberation reflects this newly-found optimism. Marcuse obviously appreciated the idealism of the young and their inchoate resignation from everyday life which he hoped would lead to a new man with new sensibilities. Nevertheless, he did not abandon what he perceived to be the power of "affirmative culture" to absorb or coopt a critical idealism when it was not heavily mediated by the facts of material conditions. In this sense, a reissued essay by Marcuse on affirmative culture in 1968, while first written over thirty years before, also provides some rationale for the inclusion of a "safe" Marcuse in the nation's press. As Marcuse explains it:

> Culture (affirmative) means not so much a better world as a nobler one: a world to be brought about not through the overthrow of the material order of life but through events in the individual's soul. Humanity becomes an inner state. Freedom, goodness, and beauty become spiritual qualities...It (culture) thus exalts the individual without freeing him from his factual debasement (1968:103).

Yet, while these explanations are certainly plausible, even necessary, they are insufficient and overdrawn. The thesis of one-dimensional society is a powerful one when applied to the concrete instances of the totalitarian challenge of the thirties, and perhaps even more so in the postwar cold war climate of the early fifties. With the increased militarism of the eighties and the economic and

conservative squeeze on social programs, a case can be made for the resurgence of the thesis. While there is no doubt that the media do constitute systematic distortions, are instruments of some social control, and do generate passivity in media audiences, Marcuse's claim that they are totalitarian rather than democratic is too extreme. While the media do exhibit preferred readings and technocratic norms and thus some closure, they are not monolithic and do exhibit some degree of openness over what they produce and re-produce, present and re-present.

In his effort to make the strongest possible case against the entrenchment of a one-dimensional society, Marcuse characterizes the historical departure from a community of publics and the promise of Enlightenment in ways that admit of little qualification. However, in shunting back and forth between detailed argumentation and polemical asides, his disquisitions slip in contradictory qualifications that make for exasperating interpretations, misunderstandings, and mystification. For example, it is difficult to quarrel with Goodwin's objection to Marcuse's contradictory qualifications in his appended postscript to repressive tolerance. Specific analysis of this difficulty will come later, but for now, Goodwin's disclaimer on this point will suffice: "it does illustrate the difficulties of dealing with an analysis which, after elaborate argument, often asserts a qualification which contradicts much of what precedes it" (1971:76).

In general, Marcuse's critique of mass society can be characterized as a visual and verbal prisonhouse in which "individual is entrapped in a Kafkaesque vise, in which every apparent increase in freedom would actually signify another turn of the screw" (Dickstein, 1977:60). In addition, he lamented the policies and social systems of the two

super-powers which steered a course emphasizing instrumental and technical rationality and that he feared would lead to a third world war. To Marcuse's mind, formal democracy was no democracy at all, for in his view, democracy has a future, but it certainly does not have a present (Marcuse in Klein, 1971:35). Marcuse considers a sane society one which "uses available resources--technical, material, intellectual--not for increasing waste and destruction and unnecessary consumption, but for the abolition of property, alienation, and misery all over the world" (Marcuse in Klein, 1971:50).

As we shall see, Marcuse was not easily labeled or catalogued. In a three-volume work on the origins, development, and breakdown of Marxism, Polish humanist Leszek Kolakowski entitles Chapter 11: "Herbert Marcuse: Marxism as a Totalitarian Utopia of the New Left" (1981:396). Social responsibility press theorist Jerome Barron writes that in the realm of ideas, Marcuse is an aristocrat and totalitarian (1973:81). In an Atlantic Monthly essay, Richard Goodwin, a former Kennedy and Johnson staff aide, reluctantly calls Marcuse a counter-revolutionary (1971:85). While referring to C. Wright Mills' and Marcuse's wishful intent to extend democracy in a participatory frame, Clecak uses Mills' own term and labels Marcuse as a "plain Marxist" (1973:17-18). From many quarters and for various reasons, commentators have called Marcuse a cultural elitist. But, perhaps the most accurate description of Marcuse comes from Martin Jay's positive and negative description of the Frankfurt School in general: "The Frankfurt School were in a long line of thinkers whose utopian visions were less blue-prints for action than sources of critical distance from the gravitational pull of the prevailing reality" (1973:279).

Like C. Wright Mills, Marcuse takes the reader through the ideal of a public in the ascendant bourgeois society of the eighteenth century, but, for Marcuse, the discussion is carried out, not so much in the language of history, but in more abstract conceptual language. His emphasis is on the separation of the private and the public sphere with a reasoning public mediating the two through the use of critical, rational concepts. Marcuse argues that the new historical subject who emerges at the beginning of the bourgeois epoch is the bearer of a new claim to happiness and rationality. He claims, however, that the bourgeoisie never intended to realize the promise of the theoretical equality they heralded, but instead sought to maintain concrete inequality in the capitalist organization of production. Hence, Marcuse argues that these critical concepts increasingly lose their liberating potential and thus create a need for new oppositional categories. As Marcuse puts it, "'individual', 'class', 'private', 'family', denoted spheres and forces not yet integrated with the established conditions--spheres of tension and contradiction. With the growing integration of industrial society, these categories are losing their critical connotation, and tend to become descriptive, deceptive, or operational terms" (1964:xiv). With the rise of industrialism and the growth of mass education in the post-bellum era, the institutions of the reasoning public were in a constant decline. The family's role as a center for authority, production, and socialization lessens at the expense of growing public authorities and large-scale private concerns. With the growth of mass advertising on a national scale, large-scale, private collectives assume social powers that deprivatize the intimate sphere of the family through the consumption oriented public of the mass

media. Thus, the nineteenth century business attitude, the public be damned, becomes a public to be organized, manipulated, and soothed through the purchase of consumer goods. Under Marcuse's affirmative culture, critical bourgeois rights which were once the foundation of freedom are imperilled by the creation and organization of a consumer mentality.

In the eighteenth century, Marcuse writes, "freedom of thought, speech, and conscience were--just as free enterprise which they served to promote and protect--essentially critical ideas, designed to replace an obsolescent material and intellectual culture by a more productive and rational one" (1964:1). While Marcuse at times seems to overlook the concrete, historical exclusivity of the nascent bourgeois society, his critique of this historical movement away from the constellation of those social forces is not seriously impaired. "Independence of thought, autonomy, and the right to political opposition," Marcuse maintains, "are being deprived of their basic political function in a society which seems increasingly capable of satisfying the needs of such individuals through the way in which it is organized" (1964:1). Marcuse is quick to carry out the logical implications of this form of social organization for the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics with little apparent discrimination, and thus a source of much irritation from his critics. Without explicitly naming nations, Marcuse says "contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For 'totalitarian' is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests" (1964:3). As Marcuse sees it, the alliance of business interests with

government was officially welcomed and effected by the upper middle classes in the administered Welfare State of the thirties. For Marcuse, an additional historical conflation is the marriage between the formerly antagonistic realms of advertising and politics. With their shared language, politics and advertising can offer consumer goods as an effective counterweight to any disquieting rumblings or revolutionary potentials that were historically invested in the nineteenth century's liberating promise of the working class. In Marcuse's words, "if the language of politics tends to become that of advertising, thereby bridging the gap between two formerly very different realms of society, then this tendency seems to express the degree to which domination and administration have ceased to be a separate and independent existence in the technological society...the 'symbols' of politics are also those of business, commerce, and fun" (1964:103). Formerly, Marcuse argues, man's struggle with nature was geared to the very struggle for existence but now man's quest for a "pacified existence" beyond scarcity and domination is thwarted by the surplus repression of a minority exercised over nature and the majority in the administration of things and man. From Marcuse's perspective, needs are thus generated from enclaves of privatized reason whose satisfaction are made to be seen as serving the interests of all. As Marcuse explains:

> False (needs) are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression...Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp his chances of curing the disease...Most of the prevailing needs to relax, have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to the category of false needs (1964:4-5).

The recurring question Marcuse raises in this quote, and which also begs for an answer in regard to freedom of expression in his essay on repressive tolerance, is who is to decide what are true and false needs, and later, who is to judge the limits of tolerance. If man is no longer substantially in control of his actions and practices via his autonomous reason, then how can he come to see the light, to judge his actions commensurate with some evaluative standards or criteria? How is a member of a contrived society able to step outside the system of contrivances to differentiate between valid and erroneous claims to knowledge? Marcuse is never very clear as to how an individual is to "become free." In a far from satisfactory answer, Marcuse writes, "in the last analysis, the question of what are true and false needs must be answered by the individuals themselves...that is, if and when they are free to give their own answers...(and) as long as they are indoctrinated and manipulated down to the very instincts, their answer to this question cannot be taken as their own" (1964:6). In a denial that is later reversed in regard to the definition of the limits of tolerance, Marcuse adds: "By the same token, nowever, no tribunal can justly arrogate to itself the right to decide which needs should be developed and satisfied" (1964:6). If one accepts the all-pervasive and indoctrinating power of the mass media in shaping people's consciousness in accord with Marcuse's claims, then how can the average citizen attain the untainted Marcusean standing of social and psychological therapist?

At the risk of fetishizing Marcuse's conundrum, let us look at one more example of the power over consciousness which Marcuse imputes to the coordination of the commodity form and personalized language. Under these conditions, advertising is not informational and demonstrative but

repetitive and hypnotic. "Propositions assume the form of suggestive commands--they are evocative rather than demonstrative," Marcuse contends, such that "predication becomes prescription; the whole communication has a hypnotic character. At the same time, it is tinged with a false familiarity--the result of constant repetition and of the skillfully managed popular directness of the communication" (1964:91-92). Consistent with Marcuse's argument, the significance of this personalized language is not so much the credibility of the message as it is the habituation to an anti-critical, functional language embodied in functional role models. As Marcuse would put it, functional language attenuates the role of the active subject in favor of a subject who makes personal adjustments to an ahistorical system operating more or less in equilibrium. Marcuse draws on the personalized language of advertising to indicate the considerable role it plays in advanced communication:

> It is 'your' congressman, 'your' highway, 'your' favorite drugstore, 'your' newspaper; it is brought 'to you', it invites 'you', etc. In this manner, superimposed, standardized, and general things and functions are presented as 'especially for you'. It makes little difference whether or not the individuals thus addressed believe it. Its success indicates that it promotes the self-identification of the individuals with the functions which they and others perform (1964:92).

Marcuse's argument thereby entails recognition of the fact that definitions of social reality have been captured by the dominant interest in propagating an illusory whole which submerges the historical tension between the appearance of things and the elucidation of their essence that a critical theory of society ought to apprehend for a particular historical epoch. The illusory whole Marcuse assails insists on the privatized group nature of society which denies the existence of

society-wide interests--save the purely procedural interest in perserving the system of group pressures (see Wolff, 1968:159). It is this functional whole with its stress on technical, instrumental rationality that Marcuse maintains makes invisible to the individual another whole that would show the contradictions in the interests of unfreedom for the majority, epitomized by its one-dimensional ideology. The task of making this unseen whole visible for individuals in C. Wright Mills' analysis was assigned to the sociological imagination. For Marcuse, this task of linking the historical subject to the historical structures of society is the work of a critical theory of society. "This real context in which the particular subjects obtain their real significance," Marcuse writes, "is definable only within a theory of society. For the factors in the facts are not immediately data of observation, measurement, and interrogation. They become data only in an analysis which is capable of identifying the structure that holds together the parts and processes of society and that determines their interrelations" (1964:190). The historical transcendence of everyday life leading from facts to essence is implied in these statements and in a critical theory of society. Marcuse's culture and ideology critique do not point the way out, especially not in One-Dimensional Man. The critical theory of Marcuse fails to go beyond negation to the point at which its concepts can be translated into practice with agents and agencies of social change providing the levers to a more rational, free, and qualitatively improved world. In his darkest pessimism, Marcuse makes no bones about the dilemma: "The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains

negative" (1964:257). In desperation, Marcuse turns to the lumpenproletariat, an inchoate and unlocalized "class," that Marx had dismissed out of hand, as agents of discontent but lacking any revolutionary consciousness. Marcuse acknowledges that the struggle for the solution has outgrown the tradition, but, he writes, "underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and the persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not" (1964:256). If Marcuse means to designate the lumpenproles as sources of more than just silent symbolic protests, then he is surely mistaken. If the task of linking the individual to the social structures is difficult when that person is within the system, then the task of creating networks of association to effect a social and revolutionary solidarity is well nigh impossible for an underclass outside the system. Furthermore, if an organized minority is effectively blocked from access to the means of communication because of a lack of funds, then one cannot seriously entertain the notion that the voices of the downtrodden will rise phoenix-like in volume and articulation. Marcuse seems to give them that theoretical chance. Whatever the degree of revolutionary potential Marcuse wants to find in the lumpenproletariat also flies in the face of history in that no class whose greatest oppression is hunger has ever exhibited much revolutionary agitation on its own. Under Marx's careful historical formulation, the working class could not see the seeds of contradiction and revolutionary change until capitalism had

set the industrial engines of production in motion and the working class was secure enough from economic privation to reflect on its exploitation. Kolakowski takes Marcuse to task for his lack of a theory of history and the corollary absence of agents or agencies of social change:

> What he offers is Marxism without the proletariat (irrevocably corrupted by the welfare state) without history (as the vision of the future is not derived from a study of historical changes but from an intuition of true human nature), and without the cult of science, a Marxism furthermore in which the value of liberated society resides in pleasure and not creative work...Marcuse, in fact, is a prophet of semi-romantic anarchism in its most irrational form (1978:413).

These deficiencies take on heightened significance when Marcuse attempts to shape the parameters of freedom of expression in his 1965 essay on "Repressive Tolerance" with its central question of who is to judge the limits of this freedom. Here Marcuse's dystopian theory of society founders further on his apparent unwillingness to construct a consistent theory of man and his concomitant relationship to that deformed society.

Marcuse begins with an abstract description of how tolerance grew out of and reacted against new bourgeois conditions which bore some exclusivity and how tolerance implied principles of publicity as a safeguard against reversion to defeated authority structures. Since Marcuse accepts the eighteenth century liberal theory of tolerance, he must perforce accept the theory of man outlined by the natural rights philosophy or come up with a new theory[1]. Under the natural rights construction, the worth of every individual is asserted by virtue of one's humanity in which were invested inalienable rights under natural law. Employing an autonomous reason and motivated by good conscience,

the average citizen was believed to possess the capabilities to discover the way to shape his conduct and institutions via the natural law. The liberal notion of the interplay of truth and falsehood would eventually yield truth as the victor in this contest, strenuously pursued and urged in public discussion and debate. The question of this tolerance for Marcuse

> stands subject to overriding criteria: its range and its limits cannot be defined in terms of the respective society. In other words, tolerance is an end in itself only when it is universal, practiced by the rulers as well as the ruled, by the lords as well as the peasants, by the sheriffs as well as by their victims. And such universal tolerance is possible only when no real or alleged enemy requires in the national interest the education and training of people in military violence and destruction. As long as these conditions do not prevail, the conditions of tolerance are 'loaded': they are determined and defined by the institutionalized inequality (which is certainly compatible with constitutional equality), i.e., by the class structure of society (1970:84).

Simply put, Marcuse is saying that in reality the ideal type of a rationalist society has always been circumscribed by its boundaries on tolerance. The concept of absolute freedom of expression has never scaled the walls erected by certain police powers of the state and private concerns of the dominant interests. From this vantage point in the eighteenth century, Marcuse leaps into the contemporary period without detailing the historical circumstances that impinged on the rationality of the real, historical subject of the nineteenth century, and without examination of the importance of nineteenth century society and culture vis-a-vis the erstwhile exalted individual. Marcuse neglects to note the influence of cultural conditions and class position on the rational man. Nor does he mention Marx's idea of the relationship between political economy and modes of thought that are

ideological in so far as they do not portray things as they are and insofar as these misrepresentations serve sectional interests.

Superficially bypassing the nineteenth century then, Marcuse simply deposits us in the present where the autonomy of individuals has given way to the heteronomy of indoctrinated individuals who are so administered and manipulated that they can no longer form their own opinions. When diversity of opinions and social voices decline and are replaced by advertising, public relations, and propaganda, Marcuse maintains that freedom of expression is then no longer anything more than a chimera. As Marcuse frames it, "universal toleration becomes questionable when its rationale no longer prevails, when tolerance is administered to manipulated and indoctrinated individuals who parrot, as their own, the opinion of their masters, for whom heteronomy has become autonomy" (1970:90).

Obviously, the concept of the individual has deteriorated in Marcuse's mind to the point where he projects a low opinion of the people as dependent creatures of the culture industry. This shift in Marcuse's theory of man is manifested in a lengthy attack on John Stuart Mills' classic formulation of freedom of expression in On Liberty. The errant opinion is no longer accorded the status, let alone the necessity, of providing a worthy opponent for truth in the marketplace of ideas for there is no marketplace of ideas for Marcuse. Marcuse leaves little doubt as to his evaluation of the toleration of errant opinions and dependent individuals:

> ...in endlessly dragging debates over the media, the stupid opinion is treated with the same respect as the intelligent one, the misinformed may talk as long as the informed, and propaganda rides along with education, truth with falsehood. This pure toleration of sense and nonsense is justified by the democratic argument that nobody, neither group nor

> individual, is in possession of the truth and capable of defining what is right and wrong, good and bad. Therefore all contesting opinions must be submitted to 'the people' for its deliberation and choice. But I have already suggested that the democratic argument implies a necessary condition, namely that the people must be capable of deliberating and choosing on the basis of knowledge, that they must have access to authentic information, and that, on this basis, their evaluation must be the result of autonomous thought (1970:94).

While Marcuse is probably correct in arguing that the degree of manipulation and indoctrination in the contemporary period is greater than ever before, he still tends to overlook the fact that the democratic principle of free discussion and the equal right of opposites to partake in the latter has been thwarted in all historical epochs by some system of preconditioning and social control. If one accepts the eclipse of the public sphere as Marcuse does, then the question must turn on how it can be reincarnated. In other words, is the crisis of democracy and the mass media reversible by introducing new forms of public discourse and by refurbishing old structures with greater access, or, must social institutions be totally restructured first? Marcuse opts for the latter but his lack of a theory of man vitiates any attempt to show the role that man would play in accomplishing and then maintaining his emancipation. He wants to preserve the autonomous reason of natural law while dismissing its other elements for having outlived their historical usefulness. He is also unable to accept the dependent creature of the welfare state. What theory of man does that leave him with? He argues for the dissolution of mass man but provides no praxis for rational man:

> Self-determination will be real to the extent to which the masses have been dissolved into individuals liberated from all propaganda, indoctrination and manipulation, capable of knowing and comprehending the facts and evaluating the alternatives. In other words, society would be rational and

> free to the extent to which it is organized, sustained, and reproduced by an essentially new historical subject (1964:252; 1970:98-99).

In a 1971 interview, Marcuse sheds light on his concept of man: "The real emancipation of man can take place only in a different society after a fundamental change in values and in political and economic structure...I wouldn't say the concept of the individual is obsolete. It is premature. The real human individual does not yet exist" (Keen and Raser, 1971:40, 62).

The mass media are the cornerstone, for Marcuse, upon which a transformed society must be built. Besides the one-dimensionality of public relations and advertising, Marcuse attacks certain journalistic practices which tend to minimize authentic political differences. He argues that a spurious objectivity, along with normalized rules of fragmentation, decontextualizes political meanings that are already subject to preunderstandings anyway, due to a fastidious reliance on legitimated sources. Marcuse negatively characterizes these routinized patterns of news-making:

> ...in a democracy with totalitarian organization, objectivity may fulfill a very different function, namely to foster a mental attitude which tends to obliterate the difference between true and false, information and indoctrination, right and wrong. In fact, the decision between opposed opinions has been made before the presentation and discussion get under way--made not by a conspiracy or a sponsor or a publisher, not by any dictatorship, but rather by the 'normal course of events,' which is the course of administered events, and by the mentality shaped in this course...Then the decision asserts itself, without any open violation of objectivity in such things as the makeup of a newspaper (with the breaking up of vital information interspersed between extraneous material, irrelevant items, relegating of some radically negative news to an obscure place), in the juxtaposition of gorgeous ads with unmitigated horrors, in the interruption of the broadcasting of facts by overwhelming commercials. The result is a neutralization of opposites, a neutralization, however, which takes place on the firm

> grounds of the structural limitation of tolerance within a preformed mentality (1970:97).

Marcuse never offers any ameliorative suggestions on how, worker control of the newsroom, for instance, might make inroads on the monopoly of thought which his argument asserts. From Marcuse's perspective, there are no pressure points in a pluralistic society that could exploit contraditions and waylay an almost fateful integration. Drastic situations necessitate drastic measures. For Marcuse, this means that since the pseudo-democratic game is rigged, the only way to get a fresh look at facts heretofore mediated by the dominant interests is by apparently undemocratic means. This would include "the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements which promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism, discrimination on the grounds of race and religion, or which oppose the extension or public services, social security, medical care, etc." (Marcuse, 1970:100). Since these targets would eliminate the "free" expressions of most members of our representative institutions, we are back to the question which is Marcuse's unavoidable nemesis: Who is to decide who qualifies to judge society as a whole? Lacking any external standards or criteria, Marcuse is locked in an epistemological circle. Evidence for this dilemma is contained in "one logical answer" which Marcuse gives the reader: "namely, everyone 'in the maturity of his faculties,' as a human being, everyone who has learned to think rationally and autonomously...Where society has entered the phase of total administration and indoctrination, this would be a small number indeed, and not necessarily that of the elected representatives of the people" (1970:106).

Writing from a leftist perspective, Marcuse's censorship would extend to traditions of the Right but would pay little attention to the Left. The Left, he claims, has not had the opportunity to compete in a capitalist system that requires ample purchasing power for access. Under Marcuse's schema, censorship would therefore certainly extend to the advertising business and other publicity promoters. In an aside that seems like more of an effort in wishful thinking than serous thought, Marcuse wonders how "fantastic" our society might be without the media as presently constituted. "The mere absence of all advertising and of all indoctrinating media of information and entertainment would plunge the individual into a traumatic void where he would have the chance to wonder and to think, to know himself (or rather the negative of himself) and his society...The non-functioning of television and allied media might thus begin to achieve what the inherent contradictions of capitalism did not achieve--the disintegration of the system" (1964:245-246). Even if we agree with Marcuse's designation of our society being ruled by an elite, he provides us with no guarantee or test that one dictatorship is going to be better than another. It is at this stage in his argument that Marcuse enters his qualifications that so raised Goodwin's ire. In his 1968 postscript to "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse's backs off from his strong prescription and argues, not for dictatorship by an intellectual elite, but the continuation of the struggle for a real democracy. To this end, Marcuse writes: "For this struggle, I proposed the practice of discriminating intolerance. To be sure, this practice already presupposes the radical goal which it seeks to achieve. I committed this petitio principii in order to combat the pernicious ideology that tolerance is already institutionalized in

this society" (1970:123). In attempting to establish that only a very attenuated form of toleration remained, Marcuse succeeded only in having muddied the issue. Despite Marcuse's claim that revolutionary ideas would either never be published or harmlessly absorbed, he did think that ideas do make a difference. However, such academic doubletalk will convert few followers in that disparate community, let alone the general public. As Alvin Gouldner aptly puts it: "Social scientists need to find a place for themselves beyond academic purism and cynical opportunism. With the understanding and the cooperation of informed laymen, they must edge out across the gap between what they know and what the times need" (Gouldner, 1981:82).

In short, Marcuse does not provide the reader with much of an inkling as to how to get out of the spell of false consciousness. Indeed, he tells us little about how we can even detect false consciousness. He insistently maintains "that normative essences must prevail in every domain, that there must be a new technology and a new qualitative science of which we know nothing except that they are new; they must be freed from the prejudices of experience and 'mathematization'--i.e. attainable without any knowledge of mathematics, physics, or any other science--and must absolutely transcend our present knowledge" (Kolakowski, 1978:419).

In contradistinction to Marcuse's one-dimensional thesis, mass media researchers need to make clear what counts for them as ideological. Raymond Geuss, in his The Idea of a Critical Theory, begins this task by distinguishing between descriptive, pejorative, and positive senses of ideology. Such research endeavors would entail carefully constructed problems informed by interpretative sociologies

along with solid empirical data on the economics of the mass media. Such questions need to take into account the production and consumption of media messages mediated by their social and economic context. As Cohen puts it, "Marxism (critical theory) requires polydimensionality. It identifies discrete levels in a multilithic social formation, and in particular distinguishes between productive activity and ideological activity surrounding it" (1969:42).

NOTES

[1] By no means, am I suggesting that Marcuse was an adherent of the natural rights philosophy. Marcuse makes this point exceedingly clear in his essay "The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State," published in Negations. Marcuse explains how the "natural and harmonic underpinning of the economy that once supported the liberal forces of freedom of speech and press was bound to explode in the privatization of reason that that economy and social context propagated. Marcuse explains:

> All the tendencies from which the political demands of liberalism derive their theoretical validity (such as freedom of speech and of the press, publicity, tolerance, parliamentary government) are elements of a true rationalism...
>
> The harmony of general and private interests is supposed to result of itself from the undisturbed course of private practice. On principle it is not subject to criticism, nor does it fall within the bounds of rational projects for practice...
>
> The structure and order of the whole are ultimately left to irrational forces: an accidental "harmony," a "natural balance."...
>
> But released from its economic and social content, the concept of the whole has absolutely no concrete meaning in social theory" (1968:17-20).

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